

WASHINGTON, DC - Following the public revelation concerning the collection of phone records, Ranking Member of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-Va.) issued the following statement:

"The recent revelation that the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court has approved the blanket and ongoing collection of telephone records – including those of everyday Americans with absolutely no ties to terrorism – is highly problematic and reveals serious flaws in the scope and application of the USA PATRIOT Act. We believe this type of program is far too broad and is inconsistent with our Nation's founding principles. We cannot defeat terrorism by compromising our commitment to our civil rights and liberties.

"As senior members of the Committee, we have long fought against Congress's grant of such overbroad surveillance authority to the executive branch. The intended goal of Section 215 was to ensure that our law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the ability to investigate foreign-based terrorist activities. But we have long voiced our concerns that, as drafted and interpreted, Section 215 does not require a sufficient connection to terrorist activity before allowing for the potentially overbroad collection of information.

"And while the recent revelations confirm our fears – that the law would be distorted to allow for ongoing, indiscriminate collection of data – this problem unquestionably predates the current Administration. Indeed, once the National Security Agency's vast over-collection of metadata like that at issue here was publicized during the Bush Administration, we fought for meaningful Congressional review and amendment of the PATRIOT Act's surveillance authorities – introducing legislation, offering amendments, and ultimately voting against blanket reauthorization of the very provision at issue here.

"We strongly disagree with those who would assert that because this type of program appears to be long standing and Members of Congress may have been briefed, that it is acceptable to us or the Congress. A classified briefing which does not permit any public discussion does not imply approval or acceptance. We believe the House Judiciary Committee should conduct oversight hearings about this situation and promptly consider legislation to help correct this matter."

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